

Official, residents fear projects flooding Devil's Gate

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Dick Thommen
horseback rider

By Marla Jo Fisher
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PASADENA — The plan to rebuild an aging flood-control system and at the same time create a major park at Devil's Gate Dam is an attempt to serve two masters at the same time, and may be putting city and county officials at cross-purposes.

Designers unveiled their latest concepts for the park at a community meeting Wednesday night, showing about 125 people a new plan that includes a 15-acre parking lot for the adjacent Jet Propulsion Laboratory, a children's science museum and nature trails to be shared by hikers, horses and mountain-bikes.

But the head of the county's Water Conservation Division said Thursday that while Los Angeles County officials tentatively have committed to spend \$10 million to rebuild the Devil's Gate Dam, they feel plans by local officials to add museums, parks and other amenities will seriously retard the other primary goal of Devil's Gate — water storage.

"After five years of drought, the natural inclination by everybody is to look at these reservoirs and flood devices and say, 'We can turn them into halls of science and soccer fields,'" said Don Nichols, who would supervise the dam's renovation for the county. "But if we're going to spend all that money to rehabilitate the dam, we spend it to clear the reservoir and (provide water-storage capacity)."

The design unveiled by Takata Associates of South Pasadena for the estimated \$45 million joint venture also features a 1.25-mile course for bicycle

riding and a 4-acre yard-waste recycling and maintenance center that would compost green waste from Pasadena residents.

Many residents who attended the meeting said they felt planners were trying to cram too many uses into the Devil's Gate area.

"I'm a science teacher and believe wholeheartedly there should be a science museum, but not in that area," Guy Hallman of Altadena said.

Others attending the meeting also disliked the idea of hikers, horses and mountain-bike riders sharing the same trails, while several speakers said they felt the project contained too many different elements.

"They're trying to squeeze too much into it," said Dick Thommen, a horseback rider who lives in San Marino. "It's supposed to be an open-space recreational area, and they're putting a third of it into parking."

Although many of those attending Wednesday's meeting said they objected to letting JPL use 15 acres for parking, project officials said fees charged for the lots could help defray the cost of maintaining the site.

On Thursday, Nichols said a parking lot and other additions to the basin would reduce the area's ability to control floods.

For the county to approve funding to restore the aging dam, built in 1920 and closed since 1976, project officials must agree to provide at least 15 million gallons of storage capacity, Nichols said.

Christle Balvin, a spokeswoman for the project, said the latest design would meet the county's requirements.